

Order of Worship for September 26, 2010

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment:

Call to Worship: 1John 4:16b-21 and 7-12 and Prayer

(the reading should begin with “God is love, and whoever...)

Songs of Worship:

“Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down”

Song # 227

“We Have Come into His House”

Song # 224

“All Heaven Declares”

Overhead

“O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus”

Song # 352

“O How He Loves You and Me” (would it be possible to go directly from 352 to 349 by changing the key of 349?)

Song # 349

Offering and Offertory

Special Music:

Message:

“Learning to Love”, (Ephesians 5:21-33)

By Pastor Bronson

Closing Song

“Amazing Love”

Song # 351

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening: Issues in Faith and Life

“Silencing the Christians”

5:30 pm – 7:00 pm in the Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

September 26, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Joel and Virginia Cook, AWANA missionaries to Northern California and Northern Nevada:** that the Spirit will sustain their love and vision for the AWANA Club ministry; that new club starts will prove viable and reach far into the community; that the Spirit will strengthen Joel for both his AWANA and his church ministries
2. **President Obama:** that the Spirit will lead him to do what is right over what is politically advantageous; that he and his family will enjoy good health; that he will love truth more than fame and righteousness more than power
3. **AWANA:** that our Commander Couple, Tim and Laura Giordano will find joy in the ministry; that the Lord will raise up all the needed leaders; that the club will grow in numbers and effectiveness this year
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: Sgt. Jonathan Sweetman** (son of Catherine, brother of Bethany Sweetman):
5. **College Student of the Week: Natalie Rivera** (daughter of Bob and Lisa Sanford):

Today we are going to continue to take a look at marriage, but today we want to look at marriage in terms of a “Jesus kind of Love”. We will find this, as we have in times past, in Ephesians 5:21-33. I will not read that whole passage again. We have read it many times and I trust you are well familiar with it.

Modernity is one of the great cultural shifts in the history of humanity, affecting virtually every aspect of how we think, feel and act. Much that we receive from the past is hard for us to understand, for our perspectives have changed so dramatically. The modern person expects that what is new will be superior to what is old, that change is the same thing as progress, and that what is old is by that fact alone to be discounted and disregarded in comparison to what is new. This is one of the reasons why people in our day tend to read lots of books that say basically the same thing in very slightly different ways, whereas in ancient times – any time before the 20th century – people tended to read the same thing over and over and continually discover new truths they had not noticed before. That in fact is how the Bible has been read in all of history since it was written. As our experience broadens and our faith deepens we find instruction and help not seen before.

That is what I am doing with Ephesians 5. You may think to yourself, “We’re never going to get done with Ephesians 5!” And as long as God keeps telling me something new, we won’t! We’ll just sit right here. Inspired by the Spirit Paul has here given a brief but deeply and richly meaningful statement of the Christian ideal of marriage. Such a marriage of course begins with faith in Jesus Christ. Its dynamic, the balance wheel at its center, is mutual submission out of reverence for Christ. Reverence for Christ: that reverence puts Christ at the center of every genuinely Christian marriage. Regardless of present circumstances or issues, regardless of the shifting degrees of trust and satisfaction with one another, regardless of the current condition of our children, or our finances and so on, the Christian remains faithful in submission to their spouse out of reverence for Christ. Christ becomes a greater reality in my life than my spouse. Indeed, Christ becomes a greater in my life than myself. That is the ultimate position of the Christian.

In addition to that, Ephesians 5 would help us to understand that the Christian is not naïve. The Christian is acutely aware of the reality of sin and realizes that to trust a sinful person to live by an ideal, even the biblical ideal of marriage, is dangerous. It is easy to confuse the goodness of the ideal with one’s own goodness, and to assume that because I believe in the ideal, therefore I am good. Then it becomes just as easy to use the ideal to deliver manipulative and painful judgments on the other (spouse). But in true reverence for Christ there is a sober willingness to discern, admit, and to repent first of all of your own faults and failings. Jesus said a parable about this, something about the log in your own eye before you worry about the speck in the other. But beyond discerning and admitting and repenting, the genuinely Christian person would also recognize that they need to seek to correct their faults. And beyond recognizing and repenting of one’s errors and seeking to correct them, the genuine Christian recognizes that the other person has strengths and weakness as well. And having strengths and weaknesses the Christian spouse realizes that their spouse is someone who is still in process, a work of grace, the unfinished work of God.

So we have mutual submission out of reverence to Christ and honesty and humility in dealing with and accepting one’s own sin, and also accepting and dealing with the sin of the other so that we can move together toward a deeper walk of faith and a greater realization of God’s grace at work in our lives.

Beyond this, if the Christian has a genuinely biblical faith, then the cultural mandate as found in Genesis 1:28 will serve to ground Christian marriage in the purposes of God. We have looked at those purposes. First of all the purpose is to multiply and fill the earth. Secondly it is to work in and to keep the garden and to extend that garden throughout the world. In a fallen world sin constantly sabotages every effort and enterprise. But even in a sinless world there will be efforts and enterprises for us to accomplish. We were made to marry, to have and raise children, and to work in the world. The work we were and are called to do is likened to having and keeping and actually

expanding a garden. A garden as we talked about before is a place designed for human habitation. It is contrasted with the wilderness. That is, in a garden all that is there is selected and cultivated specifically for the well-being of those who live in it and depend upon it and will enjoy it. Christian homes should be gardens for human flourishing. That is a diagnostic statement. It is as if you were to go into the doctor and you said, “I am not feeling too well, I have an ache here and a pain here and I don’t see as well as I used to, and there is a little bit of a cough in my chest.” And you say, “Doctor, make a diagnosis; what is the matter with me?” Well if in your marriage you are finding that things are not working out so well, there is a little tension a little rub, a little misunderstanding, there is a division between you, you are pulling in opposite directions and you say to yourself, “What has happened to the garden of our marriage?” If I see my children drifting away and becoming uninterested in the things that we have taught them to do and the things we desire them to be; if we find that we are beginning to argue about what the time schedule should be and what the nature of our social life should be, you ought to ask the question, “What has happened to the garden here? Why are we not living together peacefully and growing up harmoniously and producing fruit that we agree brings glory to God? What has happened to our garden?”

But of course we remember that the cultural mandate was given to humanity and not just to individuals. If there were no sin there would be no animosities, no divisions, no prejudices and no conflicts in the world dividing humanity against itself. Keeping the purposes of God in a fallen world is exceedingly difficult. But even in a fallen world a Christian and Christian marriages are called to work against those divisions, to build communities which as fully as possible approximate the conditions of a garden. It is at that point that the evangelical and fundamentalist churches of America have failed for the past one hundred years. That is why I without a moment’s hesitation challenge us a body of believers to become actively involved in our community. We have the wisdom of God; the community does not. We know what the righteousness of God is about; the community does not. To put it in terms of the metaphor that God Himself puts here, we know how to make gardens; they don’t. We are responsible to do everything we can to make of our community a place where human beings can flourish. That is our responsibility before the God who created us and in His grace saved us.

It is no secret to anyone that much of what calls itself the church has long since ceased to listen to and submit itself to the Word of God. Indeed the church in the world is deeply divided against itself; portions of it today are actually aligned with the world against God’s Word. Heaven forbid, beloved, that we in this congregation should become so cold to the heart of God! Let us be sensible, recognizing that the heart grows cold by stages, a gradual cooling as the mind drifts away from the truth and becomes increasingly held under the spell of worldly interests and desires. But remember, we are never held captive against our will. Our wills are held captive by the desires of our own hearts which have been seduced with sly words whispering that we can have both God and the word, and that we deserve to have what we want and that God is really a good fellow and there will be no trouble.

But of course there is trouble. Our topic for some weeks has been Christian marriage based on Ephesians 5:21-33. According to the Word of God, marriage is the union of a man and a woman. They become one flesh as is stated in Ephesians 5:31, which is taken directly from Genesis 2:24, and we find it again in Jesus’ words in Matthew 19:1-7. When Jesus cited it, this is what Jesus said, “*So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.*” What stands out in that statement is the direct active involvement of God. In this teaching of the Bible we have an exact parallel between marriage and procreation or pregnancy. Marriage and pregnancy are both represented as acts of God. This is almost impossible for people in our day to believe. It is however good news. The good news is this, God is directly and actively involved in your marriage, just as much as in the inception of life, and being therefore actively involved in all that happens in our marriages and in the birth and raising of our children thereafter.

Turning to Ephesians 5:21-33, we need to concentrate on some very practical considerations. What I want you to do at this point is to turn to Ephesians 5:21-33 and look specifically to verses 25-30. This is what Paul writes:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.”

What is the challenge that we face in knowing how to treat our wives? Well first you have to recognize the sinfulness of human nature. But added to that for a husband today you have to recognize that men come from broken homes. Not only are the homes broken, but oftentimes the father is simply absent, he is not even there. Not only are they absent, without a father, but the fathers who are there are often unworthy models. So you have man who comes into a marriage, he unites with a woman, together they produce a child, and he is clueless or worse that that for all of his clues are off-center. A further challenge for the man who wants to be a godly husband and father is the more and more deeply disordered teaching and modeling of our culture. The other night in the men’s group I was talking and out of the approximately ten men who were there two of them came from healthy homes. And they had to look back and recognize that there were aspects of their upbringing that were not at all as they should have been. If you want to have a really sobering experience simply go through a week of television shows and do not turn them off when you should. See what is projected about what it means to be a man, how to conduct yourself, how to treat those who are near to you and are precious, as if anybody could be precious to a twenty first century man. Contemporary America does not have a godly concept of either masculinity or fatherhood. So where does the man turn to [in order] to find what he needs? (I encourage you if you are not involved you might want to think about coming to the Wednesday night men’s group. You might also want to think about attending the men’s Sunday School class that meets in the Office Conference Room.)

As we take up this matter we need to be honest. We cannot nor should we desire to entirely escape from our culture. Christians are not called by the Lord to hive off into hermetically sealed communities immune to sin and sorrow of the world. On the contrary, we are called to live redemptively in the world, to live with our neighbors, to bless them by working alongside them in meeting the challenges of life. We are, in fact, to help them to plant and make a garden in which their family along with ours can grow and flourish, a place where the beauty of God’s goodness and righteousness becomes known and they will be drawn by the Spirit to faith in the Lord as they turn to us and ask us this question: “How is it you can be so consistently hopeful and sacrificial in your goodness?” There are two challenges that are set in front of us: Am I a consistently hopeful person? Am I sacrificial in my willingness to give to the needs of others?

Looking at what Paul wrote with the break coming at verse 28. There are two sources of wisdom and I want to bring that to our attention this morning. Verses 25-27 call on men to study the life and work of Christ. Verses 28-30 call on men to engage in self-examination. I will deal with the first one this morning. The first part is what we might expect. In his care for the church, primarily for the disciples as given in the gospel accounts, but also extending into the rest of [the church] in the New Testament, Jesus is the model. First we read [that] Jesus loves the church. Verse 25 of Ephesians 5 says, “*Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church.*” The scriptures are clear from one end to the other that this love begins in the heart of God and is freely given. Husbands, love your wives freely. What does this mean? It is an initiating rather than a responding love. It is an initiating love. It is a love that steps up first, that begins the conversation. Furthermore, it is an independent love. What do I mean by “independent”? It is not dependent on the one who is loved, for it originates in the heart of the one who loves. This is in profound contrast to what our culture talks about. Culturally we speak of people falling in love. How many of us fell in love? O, what a dull bunch of people! What this actually describes is infatuation. Infatuation is a form of erotic love. It is delight in something sensuously pleasing and that you desire to possess. Please note there is nothing inherently wrong with this. Falling in love is tons of fun, till you fall out! The difficulty with this is that it is not an adequate foundation for marriage, as virtually every adult in this room knows. Being infatuated is pleasant, but it is

emotional rather than practical. Emotions shift and fade: did you notice? I remember the first crush I had. A girl in seventh grade: I thought she was a goddess! Then – I grew up in a small town not a whole lot different in size and topography from Oroville – she moved away, up to one of the suburbs of Los Angeles. She came back a year later. Some of you will get this. When she came back – and now she is in ninth grade – she had a beehive hairdo. How many remember what those are? She is wearing this absurd dress that she could hardly move in and I looked at her and I thought, o my goodness! What on earth happened to this person? I was horrified. I am still horrified. It is a lesson I have never forgotten: appearances and reality are two different things.

Emotions alter the way we see things. Consequently they can lead us to ill advised choices and foolish actions based on what seems good at the moment but in fact is not connect to the larger realities and unchanging truths that govern our lives. I talked about this before. My oldest son Ian at one point when he was in high school got all swept up with field hockey: it was the greatest game. So he wanted to go and buy a hockey stick. I said, “Ian, no one around here plays hockey. You cannot play hockey all by yourself.” “I have got to have a hockey stick, dad!” “OK”, I said. So for years we had an unused hockey stick in Ian’s bedroom. He never used it once. Did this irritate his father? Yes! But I preserved my usual mature cool and allowed him to think about it. That is not the only way: I wonder how many exercise machines I could find in our garages? I like to pick on everybody. I am an equal opportunity annoyance. How many of you have done this, how many gave gone to a big fair or an exposition and you go in there and you see this guy and he has this little machine and he takes vegetables and he goes zippy zap, and out come these gorgeous things, and you think, Oh! My mother did this, God rest her soul. Then you get it home and you say to yourself, “What is this? What was I thinking? How does it assemble? Does it assemble? Which end to I hold? Why are the directions in Chinese?” And you go on and wonder how you could be so dumb. Well this can be very funny, unless you paid half of next month’s rent for it. You know those “no purchase necessary” opportunities. Nini and I did this, only I am such a skinflint I pay for nothing. You just take a 90 minute tour! No obligation! But you walk out having put down more money than is in the bank you have maxed out the second credit card and you have a time-share but no possibility of ever using it.

Emotions can arise which are simply contrary to your convictions and against your best interests as well as the interests of those around you. It is very important to remember at all times that emotions and desires feed upon one another. Emotions feed desire, and desire feeds on emotion and will subvert the will away from commitment in order to serve present interest. Emotion generates a false sense of necessity: “I must, I’ve got to...” The salesman usually knows how to play on that urgency: “Opportunity will be gone in twenty four hours! It is your last chance! If you don’t buy a car today, I can’t save you any money.” (That was a guy up in Portland.) Human beings are sheep! If they forget the voice of the True Shepherd, they can be led. This is, of course, familiar ground to any who have lived through their mid-teens to their twenties. The tragedy and even the insanity of our culture is that knowing these things we still point to falling in love as the proper path to marriage, and often as a justifiable reason for getting out of a marriage we are in and passion’s flame has died and is rekindled elsewhere.

By contrast, we see, the Biblical model says that love is a choice. It is a choice which begins with deciding to commit to the other person’s good without a primary concern for your own reward or gain. That is the meaning of the [Greek] word for love [used here]. In other words, in reckoning the cost-benefit ration, gentlemen, you come up with the conclusion with the balance of the rewards going to the beloved, otherwise known as the wife. There is a name for this: it is called “sacrifice”. Verse 25 indicates that Christ knew from the outset that loving the church meant giving himself up for her; he would die. That is what it meant [to love her]. “*Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.*”

The Christian man resolves that if necessary his rewards as well as his wisdom and strength for pursuing and maintaining love will come from Christ alone. What we see here is the primacy of covenantal love, love of what is good, and a delight in giving good things to the beloved. First Corinthians 1:22-24 Paul says, “*For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but*

to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” What does this mean? What can it mean except that the Christian husband understands that the true road to true love is the one taken by Christ, and this is the road that I must take if I would bring blessings to my marriage.

Now if you are like me, you are asking a question: can normal people, average guys possibly do this? The answer is yes. Perfectly ordinary people can do this. The ability to do this is the meaning of grace. The ability to do this is the meaning of God’s love for us in Christ. The ability to do this is what it means to say that the Holy Spirit of God has come and dwells within me. When I give myself to my wife, I am giving God. It is His strength and it is His wisdom: that is the foundation and that is the power that enables weak flesh to accomplish divinely ordained things. We are not speaking of some kind of intellectual mastery here, but rather of a transformed heart which yields itself to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Most, I think I could even say “all” of us start with some form of erotic love: we are excited by the other. But we are spiritually immature, even assuming we are spiritually alive at all. But we can grow into this, and we should.

Jesus loves the church, and He seeks to sanctify it. The basic orientation of infatuation, and of romantic love which is its more mature form or expression, is self-serving. We delight in that which gives us pleasure; we pursue in order to possess: the end point of romantic love is capture. That is why it is so much fun. By contrast, the basic orientation of Jesus to the church according to Ephesians 5:26 is to sanctify. To sanctify is make holy. More generally it is to set apart for special and exclusive purpose or use. It is to consecrate. In love for his wife, a husband is to consecrate his wife as the sole object and recipient of his affections, delight, devotion, hope, and sacrifice. Any reflection on that we realize we have gone a long ways from mere romantic courtship. The basic goal, again, of romantic courtship is wooing to possess. But the goal here is to perfect, that is, to so treat or deal with your beloved that all of her abilities and attributes are brought to their fullest and most excellent expression. That is the meaning of Proverbs 31. She is a woman impossible for anybody to ever be, because she sums up within herself all of the attributes of excellence that you can possibly imagine. No normal human can do that. But we should desire our wives would approximate as close as possible. To say “I love you” romantically is to say I find you delightful for my own interest and pleasure. To say “I love you” as Jesus says it of the church is to say my delight and joy is to see you become magnificent.

May the Spirit of God write His truths on our hearts and minds. Let us pray:

Gracious Father there is not a doubt in anyone’s mind: marriage in America is profoundly troubled, and that includes the church. If there is weeping in heaven, I suspect, my Father, some of those tears are for the ruin of Christian families and the disgrace which it brings to the name of Christ and thereby, Father, making a mockery of the gospel, and so, laughing, the fools go on to hell. Forgive us; forgive us Father for treating our marriages as if they were merely private matters of no one else’s concern. They are not. They are Your concern and they are to be lived for the good and the well-being not only of our children, but of our neighbors. So may we find grace and truth in Christ. It is in His name that we pray. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What evidence is there that Christ is at the center of your marriage? Would things be different if He was?

2. Why is it better to acknowledge sin than to ignore or sweep it under the rug?

3. Does your marriage/family have a sense of purpose in and for the church and/or the community?

4. What is wrong with the current understanding of marriage as the fulfillment of romantic love and as an essentially private matter?

5. Why is the Bible’s teaching that God is directly involved in the inception of both marriages and children good news?

6. What makes it difficult for men today to know how to be good husbands and fathers?

7. How does Jesus’ love for the church differ from a husband’s romantic love for his wife? How would Jesus’ kind of love benefit a marriage?

8. What sacrifices have you (has your husband) made? In what ways did those sacrifices serve?

9. How can a man balance the demands of his work with sacrifices needed or desirable for his wife and children?

10. What would it mean for a husband to sanctify his wife? How might he go about this?